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ABSTRACT

Educational strategies for social inclusion are based on particular definitions that do not always take account of the complexities of exclusion and inclusion. By attempting to "normalize" the unemployed and disaffected, social inclusion efforts often legitimate the status quo of systems that might otherwise be regarded as contributing to social exclusion. Among the issues that are often ignored in attempts to address social exclusion through education and training are structural unemployment, age, social values, institutional provision, and the notion of what counts as worthwhile learning. These issues were addressed successfully in an action research project in the north of England. The project, which was a partnership between a university and local community organizations, catered to various adults, including men in prison, young mothers, disaffected youth, unwaged people with disabilities, and young Pakistani Muslim women. The courses were validated through the university via an accredited skills framework. According to the information gathered during 50 interviews and 12 focus groups conducted throughout the project, the project's success in helping participants achieve social inclusion can be attributed to the positive student-teacher and student-student relationships cultivated through an educational strategy based on the principle of teaching engaged pedagogy. (Contains 49 references.) (MN)

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# Challenging the Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion with Off Limits Curricula.

Julia Preece

Supporting Lifelong Learning: A Global Colloquium, June-October 2000.

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**Challenging the Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion with off limits curricula**

*Julia Preece, University of Surrey*

Position Paper for the Lifelong Learning Colloquium, organised by the Open University and University of East London, July 2000

> Social inclusion, like social exclusion, is becoming a politically attractive concept ... it diverts attention away from the possible need for radical change and encourages compliance with the status quo (Barry 1998: 5).

This paper argues that educational strategies for social inclusion are based on a particular definition of social exclusion. The definition does not always take account of the complexities of exclusion and inclusion. The paper is based on the following publications (Preece 1999, 1999a, Preece and Houghton 2000). It explores some paradoxes of definition between inclusion and exclusion and looks at some of the reasons why the topic is of current political interest. It explores some more liberal arguments for learning amongst the socially excluded, but suggests that one reason for the failure of current strategies to address broader economic or social educational purposes is because the issue of difference is not adequately addressed in the curriculum or pedagogical approach. This position is exemplified through reference to a recently completed action research project with adults who might be regarded, in educational terms, as socially excluded.

**Social exclusion**

The premise behind this paper is that current definitions of social exclusion shape the political measures that claim to tackle inequity. Whilst there is, for instance, an association between poverty, social exclusion and inequality (Oppenheim 1998, Clayton 1999), Oppenheim claims that social exclusion is a relational term which is really more about social processes that produce 'loss of status, power, self esteem and expectations' (p.15). Howarth and Kenway (1998) explain that these outcomes are brought about by 'exclusion from systems which facilitate social integration' (p.80). Exclusion, by these definitions is 'more than poverty'. It is linked to a notion of 'normal life' (Geddes 1997: 5-6).

Social exclusion, then, is described as a state of being for certain sections of the population, underpinned by their lack of access to the labour market and its associated economic contribution to society. Social inclusion is an attempt to 'normalise' the unemployed and disaffected. As such it legitimates the status quo of those systems which might otherwise be regarded as contributing to the very problem being addressed. The term social exclusion, therefore, is 'culturally defined, economically driven and politically motivated' (Barry 1998: 9). One UK government strategy is to addresses the issue through education and training. This is usually in the form of 'New Deal' or work related incentives to increase people's employability skills. Both the above definitions and solutions, it is argued, only partially address the fundamental processes contributing to an exclusionary society. One consequence of focusing on employment and training, for instance, is to exclude those people who are not part of the immediate employability and 'normal' labour market. A complementary effect of the new educational inclusion policies - defined as raising expectations for educational attainment - inadvertently places blame for non participation on the learner, therefore justifying aims to normalise their involvement.

A simple notion that raising expectations is all that is required to include them denies the complexity of their learning attitudes and undermines previous individual attempts to learn in a system which has hitherto largely ignored the 'socially excluded'.

In summary, the new discourse of education recognises the problem of exclusion, but in addressing this problem as a cohesive project, makes some of the issues which constitute the problem invisible – for example the issue of structural unemployment, the issue of age, the fact that some people are only indirectly contributing to the labour market. Other under-recognised issues relate specifically to the nature of social values, institutional provision and what counts as worthwhile learning.

So why is there so much interest in exclusion and inclusion now? Amongst the most prominent reasons is the impact of globalisation, manifested by a technologically shrinking world and increased competitiveness. There is an assumption that increased educational participation will contribute to economic, and therefore competitive, advancement. There is also a feeling that people need to be better prepared for the new, fast moving world of uncertainty and change where we can no longer afford to train people for one skill only. The one-off specific practical or academic training of the past needs to be supplemented by ongoing updating and the nurturing of higher skills of adaptability and flexibility. People across all social groups are now required to be better prepared intellectually for unpredictable employment patterns (Dearing 1997, Kennedy 1997, DfEE 1998).

The economic need to maximise the nation's wealth creating resources and minimise the demands from its loss-making dependency population has led to an increasing political interest in the causational relationship between education and the labour market. The European agenda for lifelong learning, taken on board by the UK Government, is to increase people's labour skills and mobility, thereby reducing this dependency, now named 'social exclusion'. The solution has been to devise a range of strategies to decrease welfare dependency by increasing work capacity. The focus of these strategies has been on building human capital (See, for example, DfEE, 1999). In order to achieve this it is necessary to generate a lifelong learning culture whereby individuals develop an expectation that they will return to formal skills and knowledge learning throughout their lives as circumstances change.

These rationales leave unaddressed the value of learning for unwaged work and for those who do not have a prospect of employment. Although a connection is not overtly made in public policy, interest is now also growing in the potential link between continuous learning and people's involvement in local activities - of a citizenship or social nature. UK policies are now seeking the 'non economic benefits' of learning, particularly in local communities (DfEE, 1999a). This might be measured in terms of increased citizenship activity or some kind of reduction of demands on welfare agencies as a result of increasing participation in learning.

**Policies for Inclusion**

Most of the new visions are written in the wake of recently generalised conceptions of a 'learning age' (DfEE, 1998; Dearing, 1997) and precipitated by a drive for the now

common catch phrase of 'lifelong learning'. Both these terms suffer from a fuzziness of definition, though a concept of lifelong learning is beginning to be shared by political and economic discourses. At the more liberal end Knapper and Cropley (1995) suggest that lifelong learning is about bridging the gap between education and the outside world, linking education with everyday life needs.

On the other hand there is a European driven focus for lifelong learning which is vocationally oriented. This is being adopted by some sectors for instrumental purposes and primarily focuses on skills updating programmes. The narrow emphasis on such an instrumentalist form of learning is critiqued by a number of writers. Hake (1997) suggests that the European focus on lifelong learning for predictable economic imperatives - labour mobility, employability and education and training - ignore the very requirements of education for a risk society on which the more open, critical thinking aspects of lifelong learning should be concentrating. Korsgaard (1997) too claims that the labour market imperative has meant that 'other goals have receded' (p.18). Edwards (1997) challenges the current discourse of lifelong learning which forefronts 'self reliance and economic competitiveness' at the expense of wider societal goals (p.179). He suggests that such a discourse is a strategy for blurring the old boundaries between education and training - a way of marginalising previously acceptable differentials between the two styles of provision. The effect of this is to reconfigure what constitutes today's learning society (p.78).

Lifelong learning visions now oscillate between an emphasis on vocationalism (the European White Paper, 1995 for example) and concerns for the need to maintain a finger on the pulse of social democracy (Williamson, 1998, for example).

In spite of these arguments there is a tendency for the language of employability to dominate (Blissand, 1999) with consequences for how existing resources are deployed. Where there is a focus for lifelong learning social policy this is usually seen as designed for 'problem groups in the labour market' (Heinz, 1999:15) - though as Baron et al (1999) suggest, even here, only certain problem groups count for the labour market.

**Power and discourse**

One way of explaining why there are difficulties in perception between the policy makers and the socially excluded themselves is to see their experiences in terms of 'power' and 'discourse'. Discourse in this context is understood to be more than simply the meaning people give to language. It constitutes people's internalised values and the way they behave. All these aspects of discourse contribute to making visible or invisible the kind of power relationships in being at any point in time. Individuals can be so embedded in their societal belief systems that they neither question the dominant values nor realise how much they themselves are naturalised into them. Certain aspects of their behaviour become predictable and unquestioned within their own social circumstances. They are 'normalised'. When providers also normalise the discourses of social inclusion the result may potentially be one of continued exclusion for certain sectors of the population (Barry 1998).

The current discourse of social inclusion does not sufficiently accept responsibility for causing the situation in the first place. Exclusion is not only cumulative; it is also perpetuated within the very infrastructure of society and its wider discourses. Power

relations are complex and build on the effect of previous discourses and experiences. Their outcome could be to reinforce 'otherness'. The sense of otherness can ultimately stimulate in some individuals or groups an unconscious 'desire' to be excluded in spite of their apparent desire for inclusiveness.

A deeper understanding of how people build up such a picture of themselves will help educators provide effective learning programmes for those most excluded from the mainstream (Williams 1998). Mainstream strategies for social inclusion must take account of individual difference and different social networks rather than focusing too much on encouraging people to conform to a common norm. There is a need to take more account of how people's past histories have been shaped and shape their present attitudes. This shaping has been at the convenience of the dominant values of the time. In terms of educational entitlement individuals have been manipulated into accepting or believing that different social groups have certain kinds of educational rights. When new discourses eventually invite these social groups to claim learning for themselves it is usually at the denial of their social or cultural identity – producing confused and fragmented participation rates amongst the excluded as they struggle to reposition themselves amid the changing discourses of inclusion. Measures to address new learning opportunities must recognise that new rationalities for participation need to overcome the more embedded arguments of past power relations and must acknowledge people's identities as an integral aspect of learning. Educational inclusion also means that we must recognise different ways of knowing and doing within our mainstream learning programmes.

**Teaching the Socially Excluded**

> To teach in varied communities not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write, speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself (hooks, 1994: 11).

There is a small body of literature which takes a particular view of the curriculum in education institutions. This literature goes beyond advocating a more generic 'skills' concept of what is taught and learned in the classroom. The *curriculum* for instance covers more than just the syllabus. The learning environment and teaching relationships also impact on the student experience. There is a tendency in such literature to theorise these issues in terms of power and knowledge. Those who argue for a new kind of curriculum suggest that current ways of constructing knowledge and therefore the teaching of knowledge are value laden and designed to privilege only certain groups in society:

> Exclusion and inclusion as well as power, are closely linked to what goes on in educational institutions; neither what is taught, nor who studies what, are neutral issues. The cultural rules surrounding education are closely linked to the organisation and resources of teaching itself (Deem, 1996: 51).

In other words, drawing on Foucault (1980), dominant power systems define who has authority to know and who determines what is valuable knowledge. Only certain kinds of knowledge count as powerful and authoritative. The education institution perpetuates the status quo of this power relationship, thus making it difficult for those

already silenced to get their voice heard (Goduka 1998, Preece 1999, 1999a). Whilst the conclusiveness of this theoretical perspective is not without its critics (Moore and Muller, 1999) it provides an explanatory rationale for claiming the need for the marginalised to be heard and made visible on their terms. Making the marginalised or excluded visible often means developing curricula which are 'off limits' from, for example, academic rules for disciplinarity and authoritative texts. By looking at both the teaching relationship and curriculum it can be argued that marginalised social groups can be helped to feel included. This applies across the whole process of developing a course at all levels of the education system.

There is no one source of literature which addresses this problem. But teaching style is seen as an integral feature of engaging with the excluded. A critical feature of hooks' (1994) arguments for validating the marginalised voice is to use an interactive teaching approach. Hooks also emphasises the need for more than simply the practical process of interaction between student and tutor. She calls her approach 'engaged pedagogy'. She describes it as a learning relationship where 'everyone's presence is acknowledged' (p.8). In this process teachers are regarded as mutual learners and the students' lived experiences are central to informing the academic material. The nature of the teacher-learner relationship is central to ensuring an appropriate learning environment; the relationship encourages students to challenge what has previously been taught. To this end she actively promotes the use of 'confessional narratives' (p.21) in the classroom and advocates the teacher-learner relationship as a mutual learning process:

> Students want us to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalised bits of knowledge (p.15).

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) discuss a similar teaching style which, they say: 'Makes central to its project the recovery of [those] forms of knowledge and history that characterise alternative and oppositional others' (p.119). In other words there is a need for the marginalised to link personal identities and their experiences to the teaching content and process in order to challenge how they have previously been portrayed through dominant discourses (Preece 1999). Gore (1993) suggests this process is perhaps ideological rather than totally achievable, though the recognition of learner context within the teaching style itself is one frequently adopted by adult educators (for example, Battersby, 1990). Such a teaching style enables access to different kinds of content within the curriculum, described here as a curriculum 'off limits'.

**Curriculum Content**

The idea of a curriculum off limits is seldom explored in the literature. It is mentioned by Barnett (1998) and Cherryholmes (1988) who do so in different ways. Where Barnett still uses concepts of knowledge and discipline in order to advocate the extension of curriculum (though to a lesser extent in his later work), Cherryholmes questions the very way in which knowledge is constructed in the first place. Barnett tries to contextualise curriculum in a critical, reflexive learning experience with the

goal that understanding the role of the self is critical to learning how to contribute actively to a changing world. Cherryholmes (1988) more explicitly explores this notion of curriculum as a study of issues in the here and now which are currently 'disvalued and excluded' (p.133). Both perspectives have relevance for those whose voices are seldom represented in education materials as they facilitate the opportunity to move beyond subject matter confined by the limits of existing authoritative text.

Gibbons (1999) too, drawing on earlier writers, discusses the idea of an alternative curriculum, alongside the conventional mode of disciplinarity, as a new 'mode' of knowledge - context specific, transdisciplinary and transient, 'created and transmitted largely outside of universities' (p.20). Cherryholmes (1988), however, suggests that all knowledge should be viewed as transient and that the whole rationale for curriculum design is premised on value judgements and selectivity: 'And no one asked: why not teach about sexism, labor history, minority history, social inequality or injustice' (p.139). This latter point is of particular relevance to many socially excluded adults and has been the subject of earlier debates on curriculum relevance for working class communities (for example Lovett 1982, Jackson 1980).

*Social and Cultural Relevance*

Aside from advocating a more mutual teacher-learner relationship, it is the element of curriculum distortion in the education system which particularly features amongst critics on behalf of minority groups. Much of this criticism emanates from black writers who highlight the ethnocentricity of the teaching process. This is demonstrated in several ways. On the one hand existing knowledge is described as distorting the history of people's origins and development (Torkington, 1996); on the other hand the black experience is either patronised or simply ignored (Allen, 1997). The effect is to deny the silenced person's identity and to create 'disjunction between the values and beliefs about the nature of knowledge, its transmission, assessment and constitution' (Allen, 1997: 184). These sentiments are also expressed in relation to 'working class ways of thinking and being' (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998: 460), and for disability identities (Marks, 1994).

Goduka (1998) in the South African context explains in some detail why learning materials need to be sensitive to cultural orientation if active citizenship is to be realised for everyone. He, too, asks for the student's 'lived experiences' to be integrated into the teaching strategies and learning materials and sees this process as essential for giving people a sense of self: 'The process of awakening one's identity and voice is essential for the development of skills for critical engagement and participation' (p.49).

The connection between teaching style, curriculum content and a process of helping learners discover who they are is a recurring theme in literature which argues for a better representation of the minority voice (Goduka 1998, hooks 1994, McMahon 1996). This process is also regarded as integral to the wider education goal of engaging in a more global education. In order to engage with global issues, Goduka argues, you need a strong sense of place and identity within the local sphere.

The most common method proposed for democratising the selection and control of knowledge is through discussion and dialogue (Mayo and Thomson 1995). In terms of engaging with those on the margins of formal participation this task can be quite

challenging as educational power holders are already inscribed in the dominant value system. It may be that a compromise somewhere between the ideal of pluralism and equality and a reality goal of inclusion has to be sought. Potential interim ways of addressing these structural inequalities might be found through an outreach approach which develops different kinds of curriculum outside the system, but linking institutional education with the wider community. Apple (1993) suggests this must result in:

> The conscious building of coalitions between the school systems and the communities being served ... creating new ways of linking people outside and inside of the schools together so that school is not seen as an alien institution but something that is integrally linked to the political, cultural and economic experience of people in their daily lives (pp 40-41).

On the matter of engaging with a relevant curriculum much of the teaching would then centre round Mayo and Thomson's requirement for a critical dialogic approach to learning which recognises community experience as a contribution to knowledge and as a means of understanding their cultural relevance to the curriculum; recognising values outside the dominant perspective of the education system. There may be opportunities within this experience to address hooks' more radical, transformatory approach. Looked at in another way community learning for specified social groups allows critical thought to be explored from an insider view (Hill Collins 1990). That is, the academic position of neutrality is shifted so that the marginalised social or cultural viewpoint becomes the position of neutrality, against which other values are compared and critiqued. Hill Collins' stance is to call this 'situated knowledge', where the oppressed or unrecognised voices can have epistemological privilege.

The point behind all these arguments is that knowledge is relative to who owns it and the dominant discourse of (way of expressing) knowledge is not value-free. Difference, though, must necessarily be seen as multiple, otherwise one suppressed discourse will simply claim privilege over another. Research has shown that curriculum irrelevance is often embedded in the above issues (Bird 1996, Leicester 1993). Lack of recognition of alternative knowledge or perspectives creates a sense of exclusion for minority or under-represented groups. Learning and achievement, therefore, must address diversity. These values of difference amongst marginalised groups need, however, to be re-discovered from a starting point of trust and mutual respect if new curriculum initiatives are to grow. From this, it is argued, identities will strengthen, with consequent effects on community cohesion and social growth.

In an action research project in the North of England a partnership between one university and local community organisations catered for a range of educational opportunities for groups of adults. These included men in prison, young mothers, disaffected youth, unwaged people with disabilities and young Pakistani Muslim women. The kind of curriculum on offer was negotiated in relation to local issues and interests. The courses were then validated through the university via an accredited skills framework. The research team conducted a number of interviews and focus group meetings at various stages of the project (50 interviews and 12 focus groups). Effective learning experiences were described in very similar ways. They hinged on positive student-teacher and student-student relationships, where students felt their

experience and starting points were valued and were they felt a greater sense of self as a result of the opportunity to engage critically with their own values from perspectives which were supportive to their social or cultural identities.

Amongst other things, we looked for examples in the tutor and student interviews, of off limits curricula and aspects of 'engaged pedagogy'. We wanted to see how people's identities were being validated to give the students a stronger sense of self and place. We looked for the promotion of insider views in the teaching relationship and examples of mutual learning. This meant finding ways in which the student voice and lived experiences contributed to the construction of knowledge and the development of critical being.

**Teaching as Engaged Pedagogy**

> Using pedagogical strategies that affirm their presence, their right to speak (p.84) where ... experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material (hooks 1994: 21).

Whilst hooks and others discuss teaching styles primarily in terms of student-teacher relationships, the learners indicated that this was also somehow entwined with where they learned. The comments were consistent across the community groups. The environment gave them a sense of place in their locality, contributing to their identity and motivation to learn. Local space helps validate the fragmented identities of communities who are increasingly under pressure to respond to global definitions of themselves as homogeneous members of the wider (in the UK's case) European community. Local courses have a symbolic as well as practical value. Fahana described this environment specifically in terms of her students' religion, gender and practical needs:

> They walk into the community centre, at that time there are no male classes, there is a crèche facility, they are all women crèche workers, they are all women tutors and its a real sense of community and belonging and sisterhood and they feel comfortable, they feel that they own that place and they belong there.

For that time at least the women were able to dominate the public space and localise it with their own shared identities. Whilst each group had practical needs for nearby teaching locations, such as access or crèche facilities, they also valued the atmosphere created in their learning environment. All said at different times: 'It was very informal, it was very open'. The opportunity to have a say in where the learning should take place also meant they felt valued particularly in its organisation: 'We feel as though we are part of the consultation'.

Many also appreciated how the whole teaching approach catered for a range of learning abilities: 'You could work at your own pace'. Such comments are frequently cited indicators of learning value amongst community learners (see Preece 1999, McGivney 1999, for example). If learners are to engage with the demands of global changes and their contingent unpredictability, their experiences must first be grounded in familiar locales, where difference is given its own sense of certainty,

pace and place. This experience included the type of tutor input, the way class discussion was managed and a sense that their own input was valued equally by tutor and students.

**Tutor Input**

Those students who felt most marginalised in terms of their identity and culture were most appreciative of tutors who visibly shared something in the way of culture or physical appearance. For the Muslim students this was the starting point for building trust and engendering a sense of empathy. Tutor and course co-ordinator Fahana, for instance, said:

> If I were to walk in ... as a person who isn't an adherent to their religion or even from their cultural background it would set up barriers. ... so [it is important] to develop this relationship of trust ... [because] the women are still concerned about who has actually written this course ... I can understand their background and where they come from.

In addition, the opportunity to share within the class produced a sense of togetherness, as one student articulated:

> Empathy ... amongst the students as well... a lot of empathy because you know, we've all got the same childcare thing going on and family responsibilities, so its good you know (Debra).

These comments were validated by the tutors as well: 'It's the feeling that they are in control and that they are actually being genuinely listened to, they have a voice and their views aren't being policed' (Fahana). For some students the sense that the tutor was interested in your opinion and the opportunity to discuss issues with other students was something they had not felt was a part of more formal teaching situations. This latter kind of sharing is argued as a feminist, consciousness raising way of teaching:

> Connected knowers see personality as adding to an individual's ideas and feel that the personality of each group member enriches a group's understanding (Hill Collins 1990: 217).

These exchanges in themselves, of course would not have been worthy of the label inclusive learning. This came about from a combination of subject matter which was meaningful to each student as individuals and as members of a group - and a teaching strategy which encouraged student confessional narratives to become part of the tutor's educational tool. Fazia said for instance:

> Fahana she taught us how to learn, think about history of Islam really - we know these things but we don't think its history, how to put ourselves in the history, then pretend we're there and think about issues, why they were done and everything.

Similarly, Sally made connections with the opportunity to input herself and her particular disability experiences into the personal skills course and study skills courses and her own development in the way she thought and contributed to those around her:

> Because its a subject very close to my heart and something that affects me very badly and ... you see doing that, putting bits on paper about feelings and soon it did encourage me to get out there and help, to reach other people who have the same problem.

For hooks, this is part of a process which she calls 'coming to voice':

> Coming to voice is not just the act of telling one's experience. It is using that telling strategically - to come to voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects (hooks 1994: 148).

It is also another means of reconciling the re-fragmentation process of difference within systems for normalisation so that people had an opportunity to shape what they consumed.

Devising a culturally or socially relevant curriculum which simultaneously engaged with critical analysis, the student voice and reflexivity seemed potentially insular. The trick was to build on people's lived experiences as a knowledge base to construct new ways of seeing the world. It was not their relationship to vocationalism, which counted - it was the way critical thought came from within the students' self identification and position of being different from the norm.

**Curriculum off Limits**

In different ways tutors and students demonstrated how they explored knowledge which was specific to their 'social situatedness'. Fahana saw curriculum relevance as validating the student voice and working outwards from a black perspective, using the learner's insider standpoint as a position against which other views could be critiqued with rigour. In her case 'black perspective' was a Muslim perspective, though the premise of her arguments held true for other marginalised groups:

> I walk in and teach as a Muslim. ... We look at the whole flexibility and universality of Islam. We look at non-Muslim views so these views are still stemming from me as an insider ... it doesn't reduce the academic level or the level of intellectual discussion in class.

Fahana explained how courses on this basis could apply the same principles across a range of issues:

> A course which starts from the preset that you are looking at a particular group's norms, beliefs, values, way of life, way of thinking from an insider view and you are developing a course with particular people in mind ... it could be about the impact of unemployment on unemployed people and you are looking at it from

> the view of unemployed people. It could be about women in Islam so you are looking at it from the point of view not as an outsider whose looking in.

It was also about the value and status of such situated knowledge:

> You are not saying that these are marginal views ... you are elevating those views to an important level ... by giving value to their beliefs and their way of life.

For hooks (1994) this process is critical to distinguishing between simply listening to those on the margins and according 'their work the same respect and consideration given to other work' (p.38). This insider perspective was referred to by Hegel as the Phenomenology of the Spirit (in Gosden, 1994). This standpoint argues that the growth of consciousness can come from one's position of being 'other' in opposition to and in relation to the normative dominant viewpoint. This gives the position of otherness a vantage point of being able to see things from a broader range of perspectives than the more constraining dominant view. Put another way, it enables the localised identity to re-group so it is better able to interface with the systems of inclusion.

This kind of curriculum operated on several layers. On the one hand it simply connected with otherwise unrecognised life experiences, motivating students to participate: 'I know this has got something to do with my everyday living as well and that's why I'm more interested in it' (Farida). On the other hand it validated personal knowledge in a way which encouraged people to make that knowledge public. Kevin used his insider knowledge to critique from a unique perspective how non insiders might view another form of disability:

> I chose epilepsy because I'm an epileptic myself, I know what er types of epilepsy there are - how people react to them and I know when people go into [a fit] - the colour of their faces changes ... I tried to find out inside people [their thoughts] who do not have epilepsy, how would they react if they saw somebody in one, would they know what to do.

From these base lines, the students talked about how they critiqued and analysed issues, topics and perspectives which had little or no academic subject base but nevertheless were placed in a critical framework which meant that their analysis of situations was generating new knowledge.

So, drawing on Skeggs (1997), experience informs our take up and production of positions but it does not fix us in time and place. The learners responses indicated they were putting their own learning into wider social contexts beyond their immediate circumstances.

A crucial aspect of using curricula off limits or subjects which are based around some sort of social or cultural relevance to the learners was the relationship between the curriculum and the student's sense of self. This meant their learning was inextricably linked to how individuals reconstructed their own identity as a result of their participation on the course.

*The Reflexive, Critical Being*

Being reflexive meant moving people beyond simply feeling more confident, though as tutor Claire said, this was also part of making themselves aware of their rights as individuals: 'Giving students a perception in life that they had rights, that they weren't to be put in a corner and dictated to and forgotten, that they were able to speak up'. Fahana developed this argument along phenomenological lines (Preece and Bokhari, 1996) which claim that her Muslim women's sense of difference should also be celebrated:

> They see themselves now as a different way of life but a very valued way of life ... its knowing your own history that empowers you ... they are exploring (Islam) and analysing it and they are repositioning themselves as Muslims in Britain.

This view was confirmed by the students themselves. Mumtaz said, for example:

> I'm 43 and I didn't know all these things. And it makes you wonder where you are, what you are, so at least it really made us think that we've found something, the history ... that's what you want to know, don't you? Where you come from, who you are and what you are.

The consequences of a globalising world in terms of time and space were particularly significant for the Asian women - whose personal boundaries had been reconstructed through a Diaspora (the experience of living in a country twice removed from whence you originated). In a world where our identities develop from the discourses and images and attitudes of those around us the courses were a transformatory experience for women whose Islamic identity was marginalised by their social context in the UK but whose gender relations were also constituted differentially through 'contingent relations of power' within their own families and communities (Brah, 1996). In this way the women would both benefit from and struggle against the recasting of time-space boundaries of their experience in the UK. The course content was both a reflection of the changing world and an opportunity for these women to regroup and regain some stability through a shared identity which they could link with their homeland through the global concept of Islam.

The other students, too, offered similar processes of reconstruction. Adult returners often reveal stories of identity transformation. They usually do so, however, in relation to their ability to conform to dominant values. Clearly there were aspects of this going on too in these courses as the students learnt to use academic conventions in their writings and gain grades approved from within the university. But they were at the same time validating their own insider knowledge and giving public credence to their own sense of difference, often radically different from the position they were used to:

> I mean we are not outcasts from society because of disability, there is room for people with disability to go on and do this sort of thing. I think that has come over quite strongly (Tony);

> It did make me look in a different light at what I thought I was ... it helped me so that I was helping other people as well in their personal life (Kevin).

**Conclusion, issues and questions**

This paper has argued that social exclusion needs to be understood as a complex process. Strategies to tackle social exclusion in terms of education have to take this complexity into account. Dominant values marginalise the values and experiences of different social groups. This marginalisation is reflected in the way education is offered through, for example, its curriculum and teaching styles. Inclusion is usually defined as a process of normalising people to contribute to the labour market, manifested through ideologies which aim to raise expectations of the excluded. These policies disregard people with no perceived economic value and can continue to marginalise others by failing to give value to their different identities or experiences which may challenge the status quo. The paper provided evidence from a recent study to show that marginalised social groups can contribute to the nation's social wealth if their identities and individual worth are integrated into educational provision. The findings raise questions, however about how mainstream education can take on board the concept of difference in a golobalising society which is seeking convergence rather than fragmentation. Some of the questions this study raises are:

- How can the curriculum be made inclusive in the mainstream?
- How can policy address normalisation and plurality at the same time?
- How can mainstream teaching facilitate an engaged pedagogical approach?
- How can the mainstream build trust between those inside and those outside the system?

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